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ABSTRACT

Career education's goal of increasing career opportunities is admirable and sound, but the usual approach (interjecting career information into existing curricula) will not in itself increase students' opportunities, for existing factors limit students' perceptions of what constitutes a real career choice. The conflict between women's changed role and curriculum relevance can be resolved by gearing programs to present alternatives and a process with which to deal with them. A program that examines the barriers to women's full career expression can give an example of the problem and strategies for change. The most pervasive example of sexism in schools is found in textbooks and media; the role-models presented limit both sexes' creative self-expression and development. Role models in the schools for young girls are limited to teachers, for decision-making positions are usually held by men. Sexism in schools is further exhibited in sex-segregated courses and in sports. Needed are more awareness and sensitivity on the part of teachers and administrators; awareness, not change, of attitudes, is the first objective. Inservice courses can help educators become aware of stereotyping and its results; each district, at least, should have a task force on educational equality, with machinery for enforcing its recommendations. (Author/AJ)

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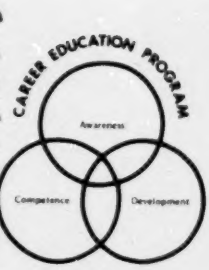

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Career Expressions of Women

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CAREER EXPRESSION OF WOMEN

When Commissioner Marland articulated an interest in developing something called Career Education, he left the definition of the term vague. As local school districts began to develop Career Education programs under Model I, definition and direction for Career Education emerged. Many of the programs were diverse as to grade level approached, materials prepared, and teacher training. One common element that emerged from these programs, however, was a commitment to broadening the career possibilities and opportunities for students. The career expression of women represents a special challenge to such a goal.

The goal of increasing career opportunities and possibilities is admirable and educationally sound, but almost all of the Career Education projects who are so committed do not take cognizance of reasons why some students will never be able to achieve it. The usual approach is to look at the K-12 curriculum and to interject information about careers and specific job possibilities. It is much like trying to put an untrained thoroughbred onto a race track and telling it to run. The presentation of career information will not in itself increase the career opportunities of students; factors already exist as part of a student's frame of reference that will limit his/her perception of what constitutes a real career choice.

Career Education programs also emphasize the need for students to develop competencies as tools for their own self-fulfillment and economic independence. This emphasis is particularly relevant to the education of women since their roles and expectations in the world of work have changed dramatically in the years since World War II. The trends demand that educators take a new look at the way we educate women for participation in society.

The Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor demonstrates statistically how women's role has changed. Women today are 40% of the work force and will be more than 50% of those working by the turn of the century (statement by Congressman Roman Pucinski). Nine out of ten women will work outside the home at some time during their lives and 50% of women graduating high school this June will work as other than housewife for 25 years or more. The adage that a "woman's place is in the home" is an anachronism that should no longer guide our educational programs in schools.

Most women work for economic gain, but social trends have added a dimension of self-fulfillment for women who are part of a world in which motherhood is not necessarily a lifetime occupation. Women are marrying

later and having their last child by the time they are thirty. Both before marriage and after child-rearing, women are becoming part of the world of work in increasing numbers.

Social changes demand that women be able to either be economically self-sufficient or to contribute to a household in which someone else is also a wage earner. The growing divorce rate, non-payment of child support and alimony judgments, husbands who become disabled, periodic unemployment of a husband, and widowhood necessitate a more practical approach to the education of women. Women must be familiar with the world of work and know how to participate in it. The benevolent male protector – husband is a myth and women cannot mature with the thought that they will always be economically supported by someone else. Today's society even provides an opportunity for men and women to choose single or childless life styles, and children can be taught how to deal with the alternatives available in much the same way that they will learn decision-making in regard to other choices to be made.

The conflict between the changed role of women in the world of work and the relevance of the school curriculum can be resolved in Career Education programs that are geared to presenting students with alternatives and a process by which to deal with them. Hopefully, a program that characterizes change and teaches how to deal with it will necessarily include a more realistic view of the changes and alternatives in society than that which permeates our schools today. Such a process must begin with educators developing a better understanding of the students who are currently handicapped by the deficiencies in our school programs.

School systems cannot plan Career Education programs that will operate in isolation of already existing influences on the student. The Career Education program can, however, be structured to helping a student understand himself/herself and the society around him/her and how these affect career expression. Students must understand that their career aspirations are limited by factors such as family attitudes, financial capabilities, personal abilities and interests, and job market conditions. A program that helps students become aware of this reality can also help them to learn how to deal with both limitations and opportunities.

Among those students who are most severely handicapped in their ability to approach a full range of career choices are the non-college bound, women, the poor, and minorities. They need more than career information to change their aspirations and competencies. Career Education programs can combine an effort to broaden career options with

an affirmative effort to enhance a student's ability to utilize those options by recognizing and dealing with the factors that limit student choices. An examination of the barriers to the full career expression of women can serve as an example of the nature of the problem and strategies for change.

Students must be able to fantasize about the possibilities available in the world of work in order to maximize career choices. Their choices will be narrowed as they learn more about themselves, the world of work and the requirements of the job they are interested in. Considerations such as educational requirements, family limitations, marriage expectations and financial needs will play a role in limiting the available alternatives. The processes of fantasy and development of reality-based limitations are diverted vis-à-vis the career expression of women because of sexism in the world of work and in our schools.

The most pervasive example of sexism in the schools is found in the textbooks and media used by teachers. The existence of sex-stereotyping in children's books has been documented by the Feminists on Children's Media in New York and the Women on Words and Images in New Jersey. Studies in school systems from New York to Kalamazoo and Los Angeles have found the same evidences of sexism. The books portrayed a stereotyped view of men and women and their roles in society and behavior patterns. Girls and women were shown as docile, unimaginative, domestic, quiet and unadventurous (Nancy Drew excepted, of course). In one children's story book, four boys and four girls find and play with a box. The boys convert the box into imaginary ships, caves and space ships. The girls play house in it. Message: boys are adventurous and daring; girls stay home and play uneventful and unchallenging roles.

In can be argued that the story cited above is harmless in that it is only a story and only one example. The problem is that the messages in this story are not isolated nor unique. They are repeated in almost all stories that children read. The shocking part of the studies done was not that sexism existed in children's books, but the degree to which it existed. The total impact of these story books and readers is to present a role model of male and female which imposes limitations on the creative self-expression and development of both sexes.

Given the quality of story book material available, what other role models are present for young girls to see and consider emulating? They see few, if any, role models in the schools. School teacher is a very traditional role for women. Decision-making positions are usually held by men. A recent state survey of superintendents of schools in New York State

indicated but one woman in that position.

Students do not see role models in their learning material either. Textbooks in Science, English and Social Studies fail to provide role models. Janice Law Trecker, in an article for *Social Education* in 1971, showed that women were either absent from history textbooks or portrayed disparagingly. The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, for example, is described as when women were "given" the right to vote. In other civil rights struggles, is is assumed that the right existed and had only to be legally protected through legislation. The contributions of women to that struggle for suffrage for women are often mentioned in a brief sentence or omitted.

Sex-segregated courses are another example of sexism in the schools. These most often exist at the secondary school level in the Shop and Home Economics course and in sports activities. Supporters of manual arts courses contend that the students benefit from the opportunity to learn something that will be useful to them as adults. It is valuable, therefore, to know how a car works, how to fry eggs, how to play with a child, and how to handle simple household repairs. Is the value of this information predicated on the sex of the learner or on the nature of the information? Sex-segregated courses that teach the manual arts assume the former. It is an unrealistic and harmful view of the world that says that what one needs to know in order to be a competent adult is determined by one's sex. The need to be a knowledgable consumer or a competent home-keeper exists for men and women and both should receive information and training.

The question of sexism in sports has recently received both notoriety (*New Jersey Little League case*) and national focus (*H.E.W. anti-sexism guidelines*). Proponents of sports activities in the schools contend that participation in sports builds self-confidence, appreciation of one's body and appreciation of teamwork, cooperation and perseverance. Are these goals suitable only for boys? The answer generally given by educators is not what many of us would like it to be. Sports budgets for girls activities are far below those for boys and many schools are adament in their support of these inequities. Girls, too, should receive opportunities to express themselves through sports and to explore careers in related areas.

Sexism, then, exists in children's books when men and women are portrayed in sex-stereotyped ways. It exists in textbook and media material when women are ridiculed or omitted from historical reference. There is sexism in the role models that students see in educational institutions. Classes that teach subject matter to only one sex and budgets

that short-change the activities of one sex inhibit the opportunities for equal educational experiences.

If the presence of sexism in the schools is acknowledged, what is the importance of its existence and how can change be effected? One by-product of sex-stereotyping in the schools is to reinforce the stereotypes that are in society and thus limit the opportunities for students to develop their potential and acquire the tools for self-actualization. Young women still choose from a narrow range of jobs acceptable for women to pursue – nurse, teacher, secretary. Career opportunities will be broadened to the extent that job stereotyping becomes obsolete.

Another by-product of sexism in our society and schools is not so obvious. Recent psychological studies have shown that the effect of sex-role stereotyping on women is most damaging. The impact can be a fear of success (see Matina Horner's study) or a negative attitude toward themselves and other women. Young women often wage an internal battle between a desire for individual self-expression and role expectations that commit them to docility, patience, and domesticity. As Kenneth Clark has already indicated in reference to black aspirations, the internalization of a negative self-image is a major impediment to self-actualization and the development of attainable goals. Students who fear success or who have a negative appraisal of themselves will not be able to take advantage of Career Education programs. Programs with goals of self-fulfillment and maximization of individual potential will be ineffective unless they recognize the handicaps imposed by sexist socialization and attempt to counter the effects.

The changes needed which would make the schools more open to the aspirations of women and others are more awareness and sensitivity on the part of teachers and administrators and not major and expensive institutional changes. Schools should make a major effort to provide in-service courses to make educators aware of the problems of stereotyping (of women and minorities). The prime objective should be awareness of attitudes rather than change of attitudes. Teachers can make their classrooms more encouraging to individual development despite their own biases and will do so if school administrations are committed to having that happen.

The range of in-service courses should include:

Women in the World of Work – to acquaint teachers with changing patterns.

Values Clarifications Techniques	– to inform teachers of a methodology for dealing with student attitudes.
Career Expression of Women	– to show teachers the natural nexus between attacking stereotypes and Career Education objectives.
Women in History, Literature, Arts, Science	– to teach teachers how they can include positive role models and more information within their daily teaching.

Each school district and, if possible, each school should have a task force or committee on educational equality. The school's curricula, materials and procedures should be reviewed for instances in which equality of educational opportunity is impeded. The committee could make recommendations for supplemental materials and course policy changes that would correct the problems. When the committee indicates a change needed because there is inherent racism or sexism and so documents the recommendation, there should be machinery for enforcing their recommendations.

The success of any attempt to alter the sexist nature of schools will depend on the commitment of administrators and community to effect the change and the awareness of teachers. A teacher who is tuned in to sexism can effect a change in the educational process on a daily basis if that becomes part of his/her agenda for his/her students. Any classroom discussion can become the basis for a values clarification exercise or a focusing on attitudes that may be inhibiting and debilitating. Study the struggle for women's suffrage as an example of third party movements instead of the Populists; discuss the rule of women in the westward movement; mention the contributions of Elizabeth Blackwell; send girls to the bookroom and accept boys who express sensitivity and tenderness. Increases in the opportunities for the career expression of women will not take a revolution, just everyday changes that will change the world. Every educator can do something to help.